

FORM A

Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Irving Nicholson

ADDRESS 4507 15th Ave. Brooklyn, N. Y.

DATE November 28, 1938

SUBJECT TALES OF THE SHOE INDUSTRY--PHILIP DASH

1. Date and time of interview

November 22, 1938

2. Place of interview

Shop of Palter DeLiso, 740 Broadway, New York City

3. Name and address of informant

Philip Dash, 1653 East Fourth St. Bklyn, N. Y.

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

Mr. Benjamin Nicholson 1649 E. 4th St. Bklyn, N. Y.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

None

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

The factory: In the fitting room there are lights over sewing machines which extend in a long row. They sit on benches. There is also a cutting and lasting room. The cutting room extends around the windows. There is a narrow table around which 21 cutters work. That is, 21 trimming cutters. The lasting room is by benches. Ten sit on one bench, ten others on another bench. The interview took place in the fitting room.

Personal History of Informant

NEW YORK

STATE **New York**
NAME OF WORKER **Irving Nicholson**
ADDRESS **4507-15th Ave. Bklyn, N. Y.**
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SUBJECT **TALES OF THE SHOE INDUSTRY--PHILIP DASH**

1. Ancestry

Morris Dash
Anna Dash

2. Place and date of birth

Chernikov, Russia 1886

3. Family

Has Wife, 4 children living. 2 girls and 2 boys.
One girl is married.

4. Places lived in, with dates

Boro Park Brooklyn up to 1926

Present address from 1926

5. Education, with dates

Night High School from 1902 to 1903

6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

Shoe worker-silled -1899

Contractor 1916-1928

7. Special skills and interests Worker to present

Knows anything connected with the making of a shoe
including the minutest operations.

8. Community and religious activities

Is merely family man, active in the union. Goes to
synagogue on Jewish holidays.

9. Description of informant

Is about five nine. Has crop of iron grey hair

over reddish, healthy face. Eyes grey and sparkling. Looks
healthy and full of life.

10. Other Points gained in interview

FORM C

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York
NAME OF WORKER Irving Nicholson
ADDRESS 4507-15th Ave. Brooklyn, N. Y.
DATE November 28, 1938
SUBJECT TALES OF THE SHOE INDUSTRY

In 1902, before the Japanese War, you know started in 1903. I worked in a shop of about 20 people in Kharkov, Russia, a big city. We worked in a shop, so it was a lot of olderary people but they were considered the best mechanics in the shoe trade. For the old shoe maers we tipped the hat. The young were good too. So when it comes, for instance, to politics, the old ones say to the young ones:

"Hm, you don't pray in the morning, you don't pray in the evening. You are without God."

So the young generation used to have debates with the olderary people and when it used to happen you would spoil a shoe, they used to come over to we young ones and say:

"You see, God punished you, because you don't believe. That's why he punished you."

The next shoe we made good and we used to laugh at them and ask.

"So why didn't he make us spoil this one too?"

They answered, "Ha, God got a good heart. He's got pity on people."

Once the boss comes in and he listened to all the discussions what's goin' on. So he used to say like that. "This here fellow" (a certain fellow named Seman ? - Sam in this country) "used to read a lot. He should be either a lawyer or a doctor. He's too clever to work by shoes.

"Nu, well, this was when I was nineteen^e years old. This fellow, Seman, had a long beard with a mustache and he was a short fellow and looked like a wise one. He combed his hair like the Czar to show what a wise one he was. When he talked his hair used to jump up and down. He used to say like that. (At this point Mr. Dash stroked his chin and leaned over as if telling a secret).

"I made shoes to the Russian Czar." So the workers used to tip their hats to him. Yeh, I mean it, he made shoes for the Russian Czar.

"One day we decide that we should demand better meals because, you know, we used to board by the boss in the old country. We decide we should pick this here wise one, Seman, that he should go and talk to the boss, like a committee. He went and told him.

"The wages are O. K. The only thing is the dinners are no good." "This here Seman was a very jolly fellow, you know. So as soon as he tol' the boss, the boss was a liberal fellow, not like some over in this country, the boss called the wife and give her a laying out. She cried and said she'll make the dinners better a little. When Seaman returned back, when he told about the better meals, he was like a great hero, bigger than the Czar. He said like a big general.

"From now on we'll have good dinners. No more junk. Borscht with plenty of meat, and that was the victory. We won good dinners. Without Seman we were all like sheeps.

Then I worked for another boss, a Christian young man, a very liberal man, he didn't believe in nothing. So people used to talk to us. At that time began meetings, revolutions. The boss used to talk and believe with us. But the olderary workers, they didn't like the idea. That's all they know is, church, and church. Now that's all right but why not some politics also. Without politics they were slaves in their hearts. Then the war came. Russia-Japanese. Everyday in the shop was discussions. One fellow, an old man, a little different than the rest of the olderary ones. He used to be "stratetic" (~~usage~~ ~~strategist~~ ~~stian~~), He takes our generals and turns them around and gets the Japanese. Japan wants to get to Port Arthur and Russia surrounds them. He always won the war with the chalk. When we heard that Japan took Port Arthur, he denied it all the time. He couldn't believe it, even with papers showing all the time black and white. Until the Jap killed three of his sons in Port Arthur. Then he believe it.

When it came dinner time in that place each one goes in. On the wall was a picture of Jesus, and the mother. Old bent down. The young didn't. There was always fighting until they were so mad and they called in the boss. The olderary ones complained.

"The workers don't put the cross on them."

The boss decided that everyone could do the way he pleased. Then there was no more fighting and we could eat our meals in peace. Some boss we had. He made it like over here. Everyone could do as he wants. That's the best way.

Then I came to America. Such a wonderful land I heard. It was, too, but there was always so much trouble and fighting.

In 1907 we had a strike from the I. W. W. That was the union then, that's right, and they called out a general strike in Brooklyn, and the boss, he was the President of the Board of Trade. Only his shop was in New York. That place, you hear, was the most important one to get out. But it was the last. The workers was so dumb that once I saw they picked up the boss. Naturally I was a greenhorn and I thought they were going to throw him into the river. The shop was on Eleventh Avenue. But they acted like the boss was a king. I never saw anything like it. They begged him to settle the strike. But he wouldn't listen. So we decided we should send one fellow. Such a crazy idea. The boss liked this fellow so much and we thought it would be easier that way. We give this fellow the honor, and he says to us.

"Oh, if I go into the boss, he'll do somethin'!"

But when he comes back, he asks for thirteen men, me and twelve others, he says, and he promised to take in the rest of the fellers very soon. But that didn't happen. It was freezin' those days. We shivered. It was near the water. One advised that he put paper in the back of the coat. "That will keep you warm." You take your overcoat and you turn it on the left side. That also keeps you warm. This is right. When you do these things, it keeps you warm.

Once we picked a fellow to go into a shop like a scab to find the situation. So he remained there. He didn't want to go down, That's the shoe industry for you. Then they picked me. I should go after a scab. That scab was from St. Louis, a Greek. So I went after him in the same trolley and I start to ask him why he goes to work. Its a strike so he answered me.

"In St. Louis they promised me that he's gonna have here a steady job. That's why I came here."

You hear that. Such agencies there are by shoes.

I and Barney, we went to a house on a Friday to ask, because he was an important worker, a sample maker, not to work. It was on a Friday night. The candles was lighting. He was sitting and eating supper. So calm. So nice. So we start to ask him he shouldn't come to work. Then he says.

"This is the first good supper in six weeks. If I wouldn't have this job I wouldn't eat."

Then Barney and I almost fell down. He promised us he wouldn't eat no more. He'd go down with us. I could see on him that he couldn't finish his supper. Such an industry.

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One day, around Thanksgiving it was very cold and we huddled in a tiny store, when we look out we see one of us running like a crazy through the snow. We run out after him. What's the matter. He tells us his wife just give birth to a little boy and he's so happy he wants to take us to celebrate, but he's broke, and he's looking for something to treat us. All we could collect we give it to him which isn't much. So we go to this house. Then he gives us five biscuits, all there is in the house. Then we send out for bread herring and beer. Then he goes to the cellar and burns the herring on the hot coals.

The next morning he tells us that the baby is dead.

"Thank God." he says "we couldn't afford it."

Then the strike is over. There is a feller, Abele, working near me. He had seven children and each year, he used to bring the oldest children in the shop, like the 14 year one or the 15 one. He himself, was a little one, a little funny guy, a little one. He used to come in late, about 10 o'clock in the shop. We used ask him.

"Abele, what's the matter? Why so late?"

"Nu, I'm running a big business. I got to see the children should work."

"But they only make five dollars a week."

"Oh, in another five years they will make 10 dollars a week.

Don't worry. Then he would strut around like a big one (Here Mr. Dash strutted around the table of the kitchen.)

But once he said.

"I walked from uptown to Brooklyn to the shop."

And we'd ask him how come with three children working and then he said that an accident happened, that one boy spoiled a pair of shoes. So he got to work three weeks for that pair and the other bought a suit. That's why he walked.

The truth is that all four of them, the father and the three sons walked to work towards the end of the season, even though one had on a new suit. That's the shoe industry for you.

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Lately, only about amonth ago, we have slack for so many weeks, a tall, tall fellow, his wife give birth to a boy, you hear. He is a folder by hand and poor as the devil. We hang around the shop during slack. Maybe there will be work.

This tall one, Morris, his name is, says:

"I have to go away at ten. Today is the bris of my little boy."

We know he's very broke, so we decide. Each one will give a dime. We'll buy schnapps, and wine and go to the bris. We have no work anyway.

When we come to the house we see he's poor as the devil. So we make a party. One fellow who came was very, very nice-looking. The missus who was in bed thought he was the boss. She says to him.

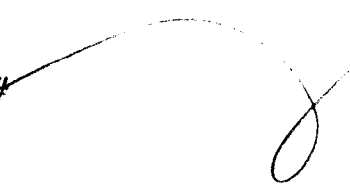
"Leo, what will be. Such troubles. No work."

Then we finished the schnapps, and the people next door came in and said:

"People still got good times. They have parties. Such people."

All for the bottle of schnapps and the herring. Then we left and we promised Morris that when we get busy, when we work, we'll make a good big present for the baby. We left with that promise.

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I've been working in a shoe factory about 1913 or 1914, in the Gold Shoe Company: It was custom-made, very high-grade. Was working there about 30 to 40 people. That's a true thing. So a shoe maker brought his brother from Italy to work in the shop as a laster. The very first day, you hear, the brother proposed to us that the new person could sing, that he's a great singer. So the first day the brother asked him to sing but he couldn't. He didn't feel at home. On the other day he start to sing. When he sang, we all listen. We think he's a real opera singer. And it happened, you know, just after Caruso died, we all thought this was the next Caruso. So every day he used to sing. We put away our tools and listened to him. And from the shoe factory developed a regular opera. Until one day the boss comes around, and yells.

"What's going on here? Is this the Metropolitan or a shoe factory?"

We thought after all that the boss is right. So we held a meeting and we decide that this here shoemaker, the laster from Italy, shouldn't work no more to annoy the boss, that he should go to a music school. We hold a meeting and we decide, each one of us should give one dollar a week to keep up the fellow. Then we took him to a tester of music. You know, to a tester on Flatbush Avenue. And it was a joke. The music tester said:

"Let him better go to shoe making, not to sing."

Finally we got used to him. We didn't care anymore when the tester told us he's not so hot. We used to go on working. While he used to holler his lungs out, we kept on working. Still, we used to call him Caruso. He always remained by us Caruso, the laster.

/Til| nineteen eighteen they made shoes entirely different than they make them now. It happened that in Kurtz and Lapidus in Brooklyn, a shoe worker came from Germany, and he start to show the boss that he could make a shoe pasted, without nailing, without sewing, without anything. And he start to work on a pair of shoes and we all, about two hundred people were looking on that shoe and that worker and we tell him its a laugh. They're never be able to make that pasted shoe in their life. He made one pair and he didn't succeed because he didn't have the right paste. And we all call him crazy.

Then it passed away a year or two and rumors was going around in the shoe trade that in St. Louis and in Brockton and Lynn they making already pasted shoes. The one that start the pair of shoes by Kurtz and Lapidus where I was contractor, he went to St. Louis on his own responsibility and he came back with big hopes that now he got everything what's necessary to make pasted shoes. But New York manufacturers speeded ahead and they succeed to make pasted shoes without him. Lots of them lost their shirt on the beginning but now 95% shoes are pasted, ladies and mens. And hundreds and hundreds are out from the trade. Most were good mechanics, and they got to learn not to sew by hand and only on the machine, So now a good mechanic and a boy could do the same thing.

I worked for a fellow, Goldstein. That was 1908. He used to make ballet shoes, the high grade shoes for the millionaires. Each worker had to be dressed in white like a doctor because the shoes was satin, all white satin.

Before Christmas he was very busy and he advertised for help. So a fellow come along, an Italian feller, and he mentioned the name

for whom he was working. The boss took him up to work and he give him a uniform in white and for no money does he want to wear that uniform. His excuse was this. For the last thirty years he's working on shoes, and he never work in white. But he needed that job and the boss insist that he wear the white uniform. So he trained his wife that she should bring him lunch everyday. And then it came out why he really didn't want to wear the uniform. He said:

"My wife will bring me dinner every day and then she will get scared when she sees me in white."

A younger man then played a trick on him. He knew that his wife was coming so he called the worker who kicked out to meet his wife with ^{he} lunch before he could change out of the uniform. When she saw him, she said:

"What's the matter, Jimmy? You sick? They gonna take you to the hospital?"

The man got bashful and in the hall where you go into work, he took off his white uniform and he finished his dinner and he wants to leave the job. So the boss liked his work very much. And he begged him he should come to work and sit without a uniform as long as he should sit and work. When he finally sit down he sit like a hero because he sit like a real shoe maker and they sit like dopes in white.

I was working for Cossack and McLaghlin, of Long Island City. That was in 1910. So the people had there two brothers Laval. They are now big manufacturers. They was very smart boys, very clever fellers, and they start, you know, to organize the people in the shop. They were so clever that every one had confidence in them like for the C_{ar}. And he succeed in organizing the whole factory. That was

the first factory in New York that was organized.

We had a nice union shop and the rest of the factories was really jealous of our factory. All of a sudden one morning the boss tells us that these two brothers, one was going to be for a foreman and one for a superintendent, that he thinks so much of them. But the workers, right away they didn't like the idea that a wonderful union man should become a boss over the workers. How could he do a thing like that? The workers were against the two brothers. The factory started to go the opposite way because they weren't experienced foremen. They resigned from the union and they declared themselves big shots, that they have nothing to do no more with the union. So it went through a month and the boss fired them. He did it purposely, he made them first great shots only to get rid of them.

Then the trouble begin in the factory. They got good guys for the boss from Boston and they tried to fire and break the union. By the end was this way - the two brothers were sore on the workers because they didn't help them. There was a strike. The brothers got scabs a lot and they went to work again. Even though the boss fired them from the big jobs. Then the brothers' children (one had three and the other three) got sick. And one of the kids died from scarlet fever. They thought that God punished them because they done a lot of harm to the workers so one morning they came in the union and they pledged that they gonna take revenge from the bosses and make them again a union shop. But they didn't succeed because the workers didn't trust them no more.

I was workin' in Grinnin' ¹² and White on Pearl Street, Brooklyn about 1904. So, being not too long in this here country, it just happened that this boss who was a contractor fooled me in this way.

He used to give me work so the prices were supposed to be by the dozen, six cents by the dozen. He used to tell me. "Here is ten dozen for you." The first couple of weeks I believed him. At the end of each day he would say I did twenty dozen which amount to \$1.20. I was a very fast worker. But I trusted him. I didn't count it. What is it? I'm getting faster and faster everyday by the money remaining the same. I can't make anymore than twenty dozen.

So I say to myself. I'm gonna count the work. So I count it over and that was one and one-half times more than he say I make. So the first day after that I didn't want to say anything to him. But on the third day I began to give it to him.

"What the heck is it? You fooled me already two weeks and I proved it".

And so I had with him an argument that he skins me. Then I start to tell the workers to take my part, to tell him I'm right. They say to me that's impossible, that he's a fine fellow, that he's goodhearted and gives plenty to charity. He wouldn't do a thing like When I count the work in front of the people they believe me. We decide that, before he gives the work out, he should have on every lot a coupon, or ticket, one dozen with a ticket. He had to do it. He wants to fire me, but the rest of the workers were with me. He had to do it. And that was something new in the industry. He kept me. What else could he do? Could you tell me?
